

Good School Food Practice

Whole School Approach to Food
Guide for Schools based on learning from FixOurFood

Introduction

This guide is a practical, action-focused resource for schools looking to strengthen their approach to food. It is grounded in learning from the [FixOurFood in Schools project](#), which involved in-depth work with 25 primary schools across Yorkshire. The recommendations bring together real examples of effective practice observed in schools and translate them into clear, adaptable actions.

A whole-school approach to food puts healthy, sustainable and enjoyable eating at the heart of school life. It recognises that food is about far more than nutrition; it supports wellbeing, learning, inclusion, culture and care for the environment. This guide aligns with the [CONNECTS-Food](#) resource, which is free to use and can help schools develop and monitor their whole school approach to food strategies.

Rather than a checklist, this guide (and CONNECTS-Food) provide a menu of ideas. Schools are encouraged to choose the approaches that best fit their context, priorities and capacity.

1. Leadership and Whole School Strategy

Strong leadership is essential to embedding good food culture as a school priority.

Key ideas for schools:

- Treat food as a strategic issue rather than an operational one by including it as a standing item on Governing Board agendas. School food is a statutory requirement for Governors (see [here](#) for more information).
- Appoint a named school food champion (or small working group) to coordinate the whole school food approach and maintain momentum.
- Ensure regular communication between senior leaders and catering providers to review menus, quality, costs and sustainability. However strategic success is often found in schools that maintain independent ownership or flexibility over their catering contracts. This autonomy allows for the negotiation of menus and the procurement of fresh ingredients tailored to the pupil population. The employment of in-house chefs is a particularly effective model for delivering culinary expertise and ensuring strict quality control.

- The following guidance from the Government, School Food Matters & The School Food Plan can help with regards to school food contracting: [Government guidance](#), [School Food Matters](#), [The School Food Plan](#)
 - Policy and Guidance to Support whole school approaches to food can be found at: [Food Education Resources](#)
 - Create clear pathways for pupil voice (e.g. school council, food or wellbeing ambassadors) so children influence decisions that affect them. Keep a record of any changes made based on pupil suggestions and importantly, what has worked to embed a 'good food culture'.
 - Encourage senior leaders and staff to be visible at lunchtimes to reinforce the importance of food and mealtimes. Eating with the children can encourage them to try new items. Some schools do this on a rota so that teachers also have a break over lunch.
 - Ensure menus include clear visual images of all food items so that younger children can easily recognise and choose what they would like to eat, whether meals are selected at home in advance by parents or children, or chosen in the canteen itself, as they may not be able to read or recognise written food names.
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2. Food Education Across the Curriculum

Food learning is most effective when embedded across subjects and year groups.

Key ideas for schools:

- Integrate food education into subjects such as science, maths, geography, PSHE and design technology:-
 - **Science:** Exploring the digestive system, food chains, and the impact of nutrition on physical and mental well-being.
 - **Physical Education (PE):** Utilising the "Eatwell Plate" to teach how balanced diets fuel physical activity.
 - **History and Humanities:** Connecting history to food through projects on World War II rationing and recipes, or exploring global trade via Fairtrade initiatives.
- Provide regular opportunities for practical cooking, food preparation and tasting (especially new items to be served on the menu), not just through clubs. Explore funding avenues for purchasing additional cooking ingredients and kitchen resources e.g. catering companies and food suppliers who often have funding available for public engagement, such as [School Kitchens](#).

- Ensure all pupils experience food growing, harvesting and understanding seasonality and food systems. If living in an urban environment you may consider signing up for an allotment. If your school has green space, you could consider having your own in-house "allotment" area. Potential Funding opportunities:-
<https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/grants/>
<https://www.postcodelocaltrust.org.uk/partnership-grants/for-schools>
<https://countrytrust.org.uk/news/list-of-funds-available-to-support-educational-visits>
 - Link food education to wider themes such as mental wellbeing, sustainability and life skills.
 - Use the skills and knowledge of catering staff to support demonstrations, enrichment activities or lessons.
 - Support teachers through professional development and external programmes (e.g. TasteEd <https://www.tasteeducation.com/primary/>).
 - Consider taking part in national initiatives such as [health week](#). You may wish to expand this to include reward initiatives such as '[food for life](#)' or '[eco-schools](#)' ensuring that the whole school is involved.
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3. School Food Provision

High-quality food provision supports learning, health and inclusion.

Key ideas for schools:

- Review portion sizes to ensure meals are age-appropriate and children are not left hungry.
- Offer seconds of main meals where possible, while limiting additional desserts.
- Increase the variety, visibility and appeal of vegetables, fruit and salads. Salad items are preferred if they are not mixed (e.g. with lettuce) and children are able to pick their own items individually from a salad bar. Fruit is often preferred if it's chopped up in bowls for the children to help themselves to. Both fruit and salad should be in a prominent and easy to reach position.
- Reduce high-sugar foods, particularly at breakfast clubs and in desserts.
- Ensure clean, fresh, water is freely available throughout the day, including breakfast and after-school clubs.
- Offer leftover fruit/veg from the fruit and veg scheme, or school dinners, to the children during afterschool and or breakfast club.

- Review catering contracts regularly to ensure quality, value for money and alignment with school values.
 - Breakfast clubs support children with a better start in the morning, particularly those who come without breakfast. Information on breakfast provisions can be found here:- <https://chefsinschools.org.uk/support/resources/breakfast-essentials/>, <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/> and <https://fareshare.org.uk/getting-food/>
 - Funding available through grants that can help provide fruit/veg e.g. the Tesco Stronger Starts initiative:-
<https://tescostrongerstarts.org.uk/fruit-and-veg-for-schools-hub/>
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4. Policies and Food Culture

Clear and consistent policies help create a positive food culture.

Key ideas for schools:

- Move from guidance to clear policies for packed lunches, snacks and drinks, phased in where needed. Some schools find it easier to ensure that foods in their packed lunch policy are matched to the school meals and simply ask that parents avoid crisps and sweets. There is guidance here to help with this (including offering [food swaps](#)).
 - Adopt a water-only drinks policy across the school day. [This free toolkit](#) may help and you can find out more about how other schools have done this within [Active Food](#).
 - Avoid using food as rewards or celebration items; promote non-food alternatives. Some schools have successfully moved from celebration foods to other rewards such as 'bring your favourite book' or 'come in none uniform' on birthdays, and use stickers, or give extra play time as good behaviour rewards.
 - Communicate policies (such as packed lunch polices) clearly and positively with parents, offering practical support such as food swaps. This works best when implemented with parents of children before they start the school.
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5. The Dining Environment

A calm and welcoming dining experience encourages positive relationships with food.

Key ideas for schools:

- Allow sufficient time for children to eat without feeling rushed.
- Stagger sittings or adapt layouts to reduce noise and overcrowding.

- It may be beneficial to alternate which year groups eat first and last. Younger children often require an opportunity for physical activity before they are ready to sit and eat, whereas older children tend to be hungrier and more able to eat earlier.
 - Encourage teachers and staff to eat with children on a rota to model positive eating behaviours. Ensuring staff are always mindful of their comments about the food they are serving to encourage children and be positive.
 - Support children's independence and responsibility at lunchtimes (e.g. helping peers, clearing tables, water monitors).
 - Improve the visual appeal of dining spaces using children's artwork and food-related displays.
 - Offer quieter dining options for children who may find busy environments overwhelming.
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6. Pastoral Care and Wellbeing

Food and mealtimes play a vital role in supporting children's wellbeing.

Key ideas for schools:

- Use mealtimes to promote inclusion, social skills and a sense of belonging.
 - Have a 'lunch with a relative day' termly where a parent, carer, grandparent or older sibling joins them for a school meal.
 - Align food initiatives with wider pastoral, safeguarding and mental health strategies.
 - Encourage warm, supportive interactions between staff and pupils during meals.
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7. Environmental Sustainability

Schools have a key role in shaping sustainable food habits.

Key ideas for schools:

- Embed sustainability principles across menus, curriculum and policies.
- Promote plant-based and lower-impact food choices that are tasty and filling e.g. consider opting for more meat-free days.
- Monitor and reduce food waste through appropriate portioning and pupil involvement.

- Student-led "Sustainability Leads" or "Eco-Warriors" champion environmental projects, including monitoring energy usage and managing school recycling initiatives.
 - Integrate food growing, composting and recycling into everyday practice. Free resources can be found here:-
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/school-gardening>
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>
 - Work with caterers and suppliers to improve sustainable sourcing and reduce packaging.
 - Prioritise local growers and integrate a schools own harvest, such as apples for desserts or school-grown spinach for curries, into the daily menu.
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8. Stakeholder Engagement and Community Links

A whole school approach is strengthened through collaboration.

Key ideas for schools:

- Involve pupils, parents, governors, staff and caterers in shaping food priorities.
 - Consult children regularly on menus, presentation and dining experience to improve uptake and reduce waste.
 - Strengthen the role of school councils, eco-groups and food ambassadors.
 - Treat catering and lunchtime staff as integral members of the school community. For instance, training opportunities and programmes can be offered to catering staff around healthy and sustainable meal curation and provision. For more information, visit Chefs in Schools who offer training opportunities: [Chefs in Schools](#).
 - Invite parents or carers to experience school meals to build trust and understanding.
 - Build links with the wider community (e.g. allotments, food producers, grandparents) to enhance learning opportunities.
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